

DEFINING TRUANCY AND DEALING  
WITH IT EFFECTIVELY

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A Field Report  
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by  
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The problem. Schools are constantly struggling with student truancy problems. Arriving at a practical and workable definition for the term truancy and analyzing the factors which are related to truant behavior are the problems viewed by this study.

Procedure. All of the secondary public school administrators from the Central Iowa Conference Schools were sent questionnaires which dealt with the truancy problems in their schools.

Findings. The definition of "truancy" which was found to be the most practical and useful was, "Any absence without the consent of the parent or the school." The findings also revealed that as the percentage of truants increased the demands on administrative time also increased. There was no relationship between the variables of percentage of truants and the number of methods which were being used in dealing with truants. The most effective method used in dealing with truants was that of administrative and parental conferences.

Conclusions. The biggest factor in helping students with their truancy related problems was through communication between the parents and the administration.

Recommendations. Research in the area of examining alternative methods which could be used in dealing with truant behavior is vitally needed. Further study should be done considering the perceptions and the views of parents and students who are familiar with truancy related problems.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

In public educational systems there is a wide variety of definitions for the word "truancy." There are also numerous methods used in attempting to deal with truancy problems. This study was specifically designed to determine a concise and workable definition for the term "truancy," and to investigate the methods which are deemed most effective in dealing with truant behavior in the secondary public school systems of the Central Iowa Conference. Supporting literature which is relevant to this study and is discussed in the review of related literature covers the historical aspects of compulsory education, child labor laws, a look at some current studies in the field, the outcomes from truant behavior, the reasons why students become truant, alternative approaches to compulsory education, and a review of the Iowa Statutes dealing with truancy.

#### Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to arrive at a common and workable definition of the word "truancy," and also to determine the most effective methods which are being used in dealing with truant behavior in secondary school systems.

### Explanation

Truancy is a problem which administrators are confronted with on a daily basis. Because truancy is such a constant problem in the educational programs of society, it is imperative that research be continued in this area. The educational system must constantly seek out methods which are effective in dealing with truant behavior. By attempting specifically to define truancy, it is hoped that a more widely accepted and workable definition can be found for the word "truancy" that will aid school personnel in the administration and enforcement of school attendance policies.

### Questions to be Answered

1. What is the most common and workable definition for the term "truancy" which can be used consistently in secondary public schools?

2. Is there a relationship between the percentage of truants in a school and the amount of time an administrator spends working on truancy related problems?

3. Is there a relationship between the percentage of truants found in a school and the number of various types of approaches being used in dealing with truant behavior?

4. What methods proved to be most effective in dealing with truancy related matters?

### Assumptions

1. It was assumed that all administrators being asked to fill out this questionnaire have had some contact with and responsibility in dealing directly with student truancy matters.

2. It was assumed that all public schools have a problem with truancy to some degree.

### Limitations of Study

1. The findings of this study are limited to the truancy problems found in the Central Iowa Conference Schools.

2. The findings of this study are limited to the beliefs and practices of the secondary administrators in the Central Iowa Conference.

3. The findings of this study may be limited by a school district's philosophy and policy statements concerning truancy related problems.

### Definition of Terms

1. Secondary schools--refers to the public education system grade levels, from 7th through 12th.

2. Absenteeism--refers to a term which is used synonymously with truancy. It is most often used with students who are absent from school but exceed the age limitations of the law related to truancy.

4. Alternative methods--are methods used in dealing with truancy which are outside the legal definitions of



the Iowa Code. These methods are usually implemented by the local school districts and encourage a student to continue to be a productive member of the school environment.

## Chapter II

### BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

#### Review of Related Literature

The purpose of this study was to define specifically the term "truancy" as it is used in secondary schools and to investigate the most effective means being used to deal with truant behavior.

Truancy is a problem which has been prevalent in public school systems since the late 1600s. Studies such as "A Student Conducted Study of Truancy,"<sup>1</sup> "Truancy, Impact of Home and School Visitor Service on Preliminary Findings,"<sup>2</sup> and "Absenteeism: The Perpetual Problem,"<sup>3</sup> are recent examples of the research which has been done in the area concerning truant behavior. By reviewing the history of compulsory education, it will be much easier to understand the term "truancy" and how complicated the problem

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<sup>1</sup>John V. Robinson, Iowa City Junior High Project Probe. A Student Conducted Study of Truancy, U.S., Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC Document ED 180 111, 1978.

<sup>2</sup>Irvin J. Farber, Truancy, the Impact of Home and School Visitor Service on Preliminary Findings, U.S., Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC Document ED 183 967, 1979.

<sup>3</sup>Nancy DeLeonibus, "Absenteeism: The Perpetual Problem," The Practitioner, V, NO. 1 (Oct. 1978), 6-7.

has become in administering truants. Before beginning a historical view of the subject, it will be beneficial to know the dictionary definition of a truant. A truant is "one who absents himself or runs off from the place of duty, especially, a child who stays away from school or home without leave."<sup>1</sup>

The whole issue of truancy had its beginnings early in the history of English education. The following quotation is offered in support of this statement:

The English Poor Laws of 1601 provided minimal maintenance for the poor and their children, as well as requiring training in a trade. By the end of the 16th Century the English Poor Laws had clearly established both in legal precedent and in political discourse a number of major principles which would shape Anglo-American education for the next 300 years.<sup>2</sup>

This move can be seen as Colonial America's first exposure to any form of compulsory education, in which the obvious problem of truancy then presented itself. When one speaks of compulsory education one must also be concerned with those students who choose to not participate in a compulsory program.

The first compulsory education law in America was

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<sup>1</sup>Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language, "Truant" (N.Y.: Funk & Wagnalls, 1963), p. 2573.

<sup>2</sup>Lawrance Kotin and William F. Aikman, Legal Foundations of Compulsory School Attendance (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1980), p. 9.

enacted in 1642 in the colony of Massachusetts Bay.<sup>1</sup> The law required that all parents and masters provide an education for all children under their care, in both a trade and in the elements of reading. It was soon apparent to legal authorities and parents that these requirements were not being met. Subsequently, local school buildings were developed for students to attend. "In 1647, Massachusetts enacted the first compulsory school attendance act, 'The Old Deluder Satan Act.' Its passage was motivated by the fear of Satan, who supposedly used ignorance to keep people from knowledge of the Scriptures, thereby, damning the race."<sup>2</sup>

Statutes were written at this time to aid in the enforcement of compulsory education, whereby a system of fines would be issued for non-compliance with the law. This was a turning point in educational history, because now schools became responsible for educating the young people of society rather than the parents. It was at this point that schools took on the responsibility for seeing that students attended school, and is an early indication that non-attendance at school was a problem.

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<sup>1</sup>Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1642 (June 14), pp. 6, 7, in Kotin and Aikman, Legal Foundations.

<sup>2</sup>Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay in New England (Nov. 11, 1647), p. 203, in Kotin and Aikman, Legal Foundations.

The following educational principles were introduced in early Massachusetts legislation which acted as a foundation for the entire educational system in America:

1. The education of children is essential to the proper functioning of the state.
2. The obligation to furnish this education rests primarily upon the parents.
3. The state has a right to enforce this obligation.
4. The state has a right to determine the type and extent of education.<sup>1</sup>

The above principles clearly defined the governmental intent of securing an education for all children and, in retrospect, created the problem of how one handles students and parents who do not abide by these basic principles of the American educational system.

The lack of enforcement personnel and procedures posed many problems in the enforcement of compulsory attendance legislation. Throughout the next century, enforcement continued to be a problem. This problem was created by such factors as the economic condition of the country, the American Revolution, the vast influx of immigrants into America, and the journey of American people to the west, which made the enforcement of school attendance seem to be an insignificant problem.

In 1852, "The Massachusetts Act of 1852" was established. This was the first general compulsory attendance

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, Evolution of the Massachusetts Public School System, 1894, p. 13 in Forest C. Ensign, Compulsory

statute in America.<sup>1</sup> This statute was far reaching but ineffective because it lacked the mechanics of enforcement and only required school attendance on a part-time basis. "In 1890, Connecticut passed a full-time compulsory attendance law which also provided for the administrative means and methods of enforcement."<sup>2</sup>

Due to the vast amount of legislation in the late 1800s and early 1900s dealing with compulsory education and its enforcement, it became evident that there was renewed concern for the educational climate of the country as well as concern with truancy. At this point in American history, education was beginning to be viewed as a means of social reform. It aided in preventing crime, minimized the problems of poverty and illiteracy, and was a means of developing an intelligent public that voted with an understanding of political problems.

In the early 1900s, and during the industrial revolution of America, compulsory education statutes became much more stringent and required students to spend more hours and days in school. This was also a period in which the enforcement of these measures was emphasized. "By the

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School Attendance and Child Labor (N.Y.: Arno, 1969), p. 23.

<sup>1</sup>Kotin and Aikman, Legal Foundations, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>R. Freeman Butts and Lawrence A. Cremin, A History of Education in American Culture (N.Y.: Holt, 1953), pp. 246 ff.

end of the 19th Century, most states had a program of compulsory education, and in the next two decades most states adopted child labor laws."<sup>1</sup>

Child labor laws were probably the most effective means of handling truancy problems in the history of our educational system. They were designed to work hand in hand with the compulsory education laws. These labor laws still vary from state to state, but most of them require that children between the ages of seven and sixteen not be employed during school hours. "By the late 1930s Child Labor Laws were pretty firmly established."<sup>2</sup>

As the child labor laws became more rigid and specific, so did the compulsory education laws. Because more demands and requirements were being placed on students pertaining to the amount of time they were required to be in attendance at school, the problems of truancy increased. Most states have compulsory education statutes that require students to be in attendance from eight to ten months a year. The State of Iowa considers 180 days as a normal school year.

Having considered the historical and legal perspective of the truancy and compulsory education issues, it will now be beneficial to examine some current studies

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<sup>1</sup>Kotin and Aikman, Legal Foundations, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 227-237.

that have dealt with these topics. In a study conducted by the Illinois State Office of Education concerning truancy problems, the following definitions were given to this item on the questionnaire--"List your school's definition of truancy." The responses were listed in order from one to eight with one being the most frequent response.

1. Absences without the knowledge or consent of the parent
2. Three consecutive days of absence
3. Repeated unexcused absences
4. Any unexplained absence
5. Absence without the knowledge or consent of the parents or school
6. Five to ten absences in a nine-week period
7. Absences with parents' knowledge but without sufficient reason
8. Twelve to fifteen days of unexcused absence<sup>1</sup>

This study also found that some schools not only had the classification of "truant," but subdivided that classification into a group called "chronic truants." The definitions of a "chronic truant" in order of the frequency of response were:

1. Repeated unexcused absences
2. Three consecutive days of unexcused absence
3. Ten days of unexcused absence
4. Ten days of unexcused absence in a nine week period
5. Five consecutive days of absence
6. One or more days of absence, with no acceptable reason--this includes absences on certain days of the week--like Friday or Monday
7. Repeated truancy after parent conferences
8. Absences which affect a student's learning process

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<sup>1</sup> Illinois, State Office of Education, Truancy and School Attendance in Illinois Schools, 1967-1977, U.S., Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC Document ED 155 541, 1977.



9. Determined on an individual basis, usually by the principal
10. A percentage of non-attendance usually ranging from 20 to 70 percent<sup>1</sup>

This study by the State of Illinois points out the need for a more accurate definition of the term "truancy." The problems presented by such a variable and often general definition of truancy were enormous. When does an administrator report truancy to state agencies? The questions are almost infinite. The Illinois study serves as the basis by which the instrumentation for this study has been developed. The above definitions of truancy were used in the questionnaire.

Another study reinforces the ambiguities that surround the definition of "truancy." This study concerned the New York City public schools. When asking questions about truancy, three categories were used to classify truancy:

- A. Long-term Absentees
- B. The Intermediate Absentee
- C. The Cutters<sup>2</sup>

Defining truancy would be a simple matter if all educational systems operated under the same philosophy, but they do not agree on this matter. Some educators believe

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<sup>1</sup>Illinois, Truancy and School Attendance.

<sup>2</sup>Susan Amlung, Empty Desks at Schools, Improving Attendance in the New York City Public Schools, U.S., Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC Document ED 188 317, 1980.

that schools should search for every available opportunity to keep a student interested in and involved in the educational system. Other educators believe there are lessons to be learned by setting strict guidelines and enforcing them. One such rule stipulated that if a student could not abide by the rules he or she should be suspended or expelled. Differing educational philosophys confuse the question of where to draw the line on truancy and how to define truancy.

It is important at this time not only to consider the confusing views of the term "truancy," but also to look at why students are truant and what the outcomes of the truant behavior are. Numerous studies have been done on the effects of truancy in a student's lifetime as well as the reasons students become truant. In 1977, a group of young black men in the Washington, D.C., area were studied. It was reported that "elementary truancy significantly predicted four subsequent childhood events: being held back in elementary school, dropping out of high school, leaving the parents before age eighteen, and becoming married before age eighteen."<sup>1</sup> This study denotes some of the serious outcomes associated with truancy. Another study of the outcomes associated with truancy conducted by Robbins and Radcliff stated that:

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<sup>1</sup>L. N. Robins and E. Wish, Childhood Deviance as a Developmental Process, U.S., Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC Document, ED 158 893, 1978.

Elementary truancy, often beginning in first grade, forecast continued truancy in high school. Particularly, in those who had deviant behaviors such as drinking, early sexual activity, illicit drug use, and delinquency. Both elementary and high school truancy were associated with dropping out of school before completing a secondary education, and also with low earnings as an adult.<sup>1</sup>

Although the reasons why students become truant are numerous, the following study gives one example of why students may decide to be truant. Susan Amlung, in her study of the New York City schools said:

Much of the literature on truancy indicates that a significant factor in a child's decision to become truant is in his or her feelings of isolation combined with the coping abilities and strength he or she brings to that situation . . . often students perceive the education being offered as irrelevant to their lives and the future prospects. This can be the beginning of the feeling of 'not belonging.'<sup>2</sup>

Students decide to be truant for several complex reasons, related to fears, lack of parental encouragement, and discouraging experiences in school. The following study points to another possible cause. Florence Barton, in her study, "Do Teachers Cause Dropouts," found that a teacher is the most significant influence in the school that can cause students to drop out.<sup>3</sup> After viewing a

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<sup>1</sup>Lee Nelken Robbins and Kathryn Strother Radcliff, Long Range Outcomes Associated with School Truancy, U.S., Educational Resources Information Center, ERIC Document ED 152 893, 1978.

<sup>2</sup>Amlung, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Florence Richter Barton, "Do Teachers Cause Dropouts," Dissertation Abstract International, XXXIII (1972), 886-A.

portion of the research that has been conducted in the area of truancy, it is evident that truancy is a complex issue and problem of educational systems.

Many individuals see other alternatives to the truancy problem. These people believe that it would be beneficial to drastically change compulsory attendance statutes or abolish them all together. Two well known advocates of the decentralization of schools, who have written books which speak to the problems of truancy and elimination of compulsory attendance laws, are Everett Reimer,<sup>1</sup> and Ivan Illich.<sup>2</sup> Both texts were published in the early seventies, which indicates that the idea of eliminating compulsory attendance continues to be a moot point. Paul Goodman writes in his book entitled, Compulsory Mis-Education:

A youngster is compelled for twelve continuous years [if middle class, for sixteen years], to work on assigned lessons, during a lively period of life when one hopes he might invent enterprises of his own. Because of school work, he cannot follow his nose in reading or browsing in the library, or concentrate on a hobby that fires him, or get involved in political action. The school system as a whole, with its increasingly set curriculum, stricter grading, incredible amounts of testing, is already a vast machine to shape acceptable responses.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Everett Reimer, School is Dead, Alternatives to Education (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971).

<sup>2</sup>Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1970).

<sup>3</sup>Paul Goodman, Compulsory Miseducation and the Community of Scholars (New York: Vintage Book, 1964), p. 87.

There is considerable discussion which opposes compulsory education in our society, and contending with truancy problems stimulates this discussion. Even though alternative approaches to truancy have been discussed, the ideas have not been implemented and, therefore, are still in the theoretical stage. In an article written by Howard M. Johnson, Frank Brown, the Chairman of the National Commission on Education, was quoted as saying: "The nation does not need laws that enforce adolescents to go to school. It needs schools and school related programs that make adolescents wish to come."<sup>1</sup>

This last quotation summarizes precisely the feelings and attitudes many people hold when discussing the topics of truancy and compulsory education. These opinions which are contrary to present laws and local rules, make administering and defining truancy that much more difficult.

It is imperative that the Iowa Code, pertaining to truancy, be reviewed so the root of the problem can be identified. This review will point out the lack of specificity with which the present statutes talk about truancy. In sections 299.1 and 299.8 of the Code, the law states:

[299.1] Any person having control of any child over seven and under sixteen years of age, in proper

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<sup>1</sup>Howard M. Johnson, "Are Compulsory Attendance Laws Outdated," Phi Delta Kappan, VII (1978), 37-39.

physical and mental condition to attend school, shall cause said student to attend some public school for at least 24 consecutive school weeks in each school year.

[299.8] Any child over seven and under sixteen years of age, in proper physical and mental ability to attend school, who fails to attend school regularly, as provided for by this chapter, without reasonable excuse for his absence, shall be deemed to be "truant."<sup>1</sup>

From the above quotation, it is evident that the Code speaks in generalities. Sec. 299.8 says "students should attend regularly," and also "without reasonable absence." This statement would be perfectly acceptable if it specified what was meant by the terms "regularly" and "reasonable." These two words leave the definition of truancy vague in the minds of educators. Every school district assumes the task of developing its own policies, rules, and regulations, which specifically define attendance and truancy. The practice of forcing local districts to regulate their own policies may be acceptable, but it also creates inequities and inconsistencies in the enforcement of attendance and truancy regulations.

### Summary

It is obvious that there is a considerable amount of ambiguity present in determining the actual criteria involved in determining whether a student is truant or not.

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<sup>1</sup>Code of Iowa, II, Sec 299.1 and 299.8 (Des Moines: State Printing Office, 1981), p. 1425.

The purpose of this study is to search for a more workable and practical definition of truancy and to gather information which would be beneficial in determining the methods which are effective in administering truancy. The objective of this study is to arrive at a definition of truancy that will be understandable and specific so that it can be clearly interpreted by students, teachers, parents, administrators, and legal authorities; analyze the various approaches that were implemented in working with truants; and study those approaches in an attempt to determine which of them appeared to be most effective.

## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION OF DATA

#### Introduction

Chapter III of this study is devoted to the design and procedures which were followed while conducting the research. The information in this section of the paper includes the general design of the study, the population and sample group, and the presentation of data.

#### General Design and Implementation

This study was conducted through the use of a questionnaire entitled "The Truancy Definition and Clarification Questionnaire." This questionnaire was patterned in congruence with the responses given to the study of truancy done by the Department of Public Instruction of the state of Illinois.<sup>1</sup> It was specifically designed to answer the questions of the study which were stated in Chapter I. The format of the questionnaire was chosen because of the variety of data needed. Two basic research techniques were used. The first technique used in Item Number One of the questionnaire was the ranking of ten definitions for the term truancy from one through ten. The second technique

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<sup>1</sup>Illinois, Truancy and School Attendance.



was that of merely requesting that the respondents fill in factual information about their school and how they dealt with truancy. The appendix contains the introductory letter and the questionnaire used in researching these topics. Before the questionnaire was formally used in this study, it was reviewed by a team of secondary school administrators in the Urbandale Community School District. The team was comprised of one junior high administrator, two high school administrators, and two central office administrators who were former building level principals. In the final phase of validating the questionnaire, it was critiqued by two education professors from Drake University.

#### Population and Sample

The population from which the sample group was selected consisted of the secondary school administrators in the Central Iowa Conference. All of the members of this group were used in the sample group due to the small number of administrators in secondary school positions in the conference schools. This group was selected because it represented a wide variety of administrative experience, background, and knowledge about truancy related matters and also represented a good cross-section of urban, suburban, and rural schools in Iowa.

The sampling methods used in this study were that of an available sample as well as a convenient sample. The sample group was both available and convenient due to

the fact that the researcher was an instructor in one of the participating Central Iowa Conference schools.

The objective of this study was to question all of the secondary school administrators in the C.I.C. At the time the study took place, in June of 1982, there were twenty-five administrators at the secondary level who were actively administering schools. Of those twenty-five administrators, twenty-four of them were men and one was a woman. From the twenty-five administrators who were questioned, responses were received from twenty-one, giving the study a response rate of 84 percent. The average administrative experience of the twenty-one administrators who responded was fifteen and a half years.

Table 1

Rate of Response to Questionnaire on  
Defining and Clarifying Truancy

	Number	Percentage
Participants	21	84
Non-Participants	4	16

#### Presentation of Data

The data obtained by the questionnaire has been analyzed either descriptively or statistically depending upon its nature.

The primary objective of this study was to arrive

at a practical definition for the term "truancy" which could be used in secondary public schools. A list of ten definitions for the term "truancy" were chosen from a study done on truancy in 1977 by the Department of Public Instruction of the state of Illinois.<sup>1</sup> Each person questioned in this study was given a list containing ten different definitions for the term truancy and was asked to rank them from one through ten. The respondents were instructed to give the number one ranking to the definition which they felt most practically defined the term truancy and the number ten ranking then would be given to the least practical definition of truancy. The following data was collected in response to question number one of the questionnaire. It should be noted that four of the twenty-one respondents misinterpreted the requested method of ranking the definitions. These four scores have been averaged to permit the responses to be useful to the study.

The data for Table 2 was computed by totaling all of the rankings given for each definition. After comparing the overall scores for each definition, they were put into a numerical order from lowest to highest point totals. The definition which scored the lowest and indicated the sample groups preferred definition of the term "truancy"

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<sup>1</sup>Illinois, Truancy and School Attendance.

Table 2  
Individual Rankings to the Ten  
Definitions of Truancy

Respondent	Definition									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	3	7.5	7.5	3	3	7.5	10	7.5	3	3
2	2	9	5	4	1	8	3	7	10	6
3	6	5	4	2	1	10	3	9	8	7
4	3	7	5	4	1	8	6	10	9	2
5	1	8	5	6	2	9	3	10	4	7
6	2	8	5	3	1	9	4	10	6	7
7	3	8	4	2	1	9	7	10	5	6
8	2	8	5	3	1	9	4	10	6	7
9	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	1	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5
10	2	7	7	3	1	7	7	7	7	7
11	2	8	7	3	1	9	4	10	5	6
12	2	8	7	9	1	3	10	4	6	5
13	2	4	6	3	1	8	10	9	5	7
14	1	5	6	3	2	9	4	8	7	10
15	3	8	5	4	2	7	1	10	6	9
16	5	4	3	10	8	6	9	7	1	2
17	1.5	9.5	3.5	7.5	1.5	5.5	7.5	5.5	3.5	9.5
18	3	8	4	2	1	7	10	6	5	9
19	2	8	5	3	1	7	4	9	6	10
20	4	5	6	3	2	8	1	9	7	10
21	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5
Total	60.5	146	111	885	39	157	118.5	169	120.5	140.5

was definition E with a cumulative score of thirty-nine points. The results of this data indicate that the most practical definition for the term truancy is, "Any absence without the consent of the parents or the school." Table 3 indicates the final placement of the ten definitions for truancy ranked according to the cumulative point totals.

Table 3  
Cumulative Ranking of the Ten  
Truancy Definitions

Point Total	Letter	Definition
39	E	Any absence without the consent of the <u>parent or the school</u>
60.5	A	Absence without the knowledge or consent of the parent
88.5	D	Any unexplained absence
111	C	Repeated unexcused absence
118.5	G	Absence with parental knowledge but without sufficient reason
120.5	I	Repeated unexcused absence after parental conference
140.5	J	One or more absences per week with no acceptable reason; such as absences on certain days of the week like Monday or Friday
146	B	Three consecutive days of unexcused absence
157	F	Five to ten days of unexcused absence in a nine-week period
169	H	Twelve to fifteen days of unexcused absence

In an attempt to answer Question Two of this study, "Does a relationship exist between the percentage of truants in a school and the amount of time an administrator spends working on truancy related problems," it is necessary to examine the data collected in Questions Two and Three of the questionnaire.

Question Two of the questionnaire asked each administrator to determine the percentage of students that were truant in their school during a normal year. The data in Table 4 was collected in conjunction with Question Two of the questionnaire.

The third item on the questionnaire asked each administrator to indicate how many hours per week were spent administering truancy related matters. The data in Table 5 was collected in response to Question Three of the questionnaire.

To statistically determine the relationship between the percentage of students who were truant in a school year and the amount of time an administrator spent administering truancy related problems, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. The acceptable level of significance of this one-tailed test was measured at .05. The computed correlation of the two variables was an  $r$  value of .636 with a standard error of estimate of 1.377. The  $r$  value, when examined at the .05 level of significance, provided a relationship between the two variables

Table 4

Percentage of Students Truant  
in a Normal Year

Respondents	Percentage of Truancy in the Schools						
	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-more
1	X						
2						X	
3	X						
4	X						
5		X					
6			X				
7			X				
8	X						
9	X						
10			X				
11	X						
12							X
13	X						
14	X						
15				X			
16		X					
17	X						
18			X				
19	X						
20	X						
21	X						
Totals	12	2	4	1	0	1	1

Table 5

Hours Worked Weekly on Truancy  
Related Problems

Respondent	Hours Worked Weekly						
	0-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-more
1				X			
2				X			
3	X						
4	X						
5				X			
6				X			
7	X						
8	X						
9	X						
10			X				
11	X						
12						X	
13	X						
14	X						
15			X				
16				X			
17			X				
18		X					
19	X						
20				X			
21	X						
Totals	10	1	3	6	0	1	0



which was beyond the realm of chance. This data infers that there is a direct relationship between the number of students who were truant in a normal year in the C.I.C. and the number of hours spent in administering truancy related matters.

Question Four on the questionnaire asked each administrator to review a list of sixteen methods that could be used for administering truancy related problems. These sixteen methods were reported to the Department of Public Instruction of the State of Illinois during their 1977 study on truancy and attendance.<sup>1</sup> The methods were selected for the questionnaire because of simple reporting and lack of determination of effectiveness. Following a review of the list of methods, each administrator was asked to check each method they were currently using in the administration of truancy related problems. Table 6 illustrates the methods on the questionnaire and the frequency each was checked.

The question asked in Question Four was: "Does a relationship exist between the variables of the percentage of truants in a school in a normal year and the number of methods which are used in administering truant behavior?" This relationship was determined by the use of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The data in Table 7 was used in this comparison.

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<sup>1</sup> Illinois, Truancy and School Attendance.

Table 6

Frequency of Methods Used in Administrrating  
Truant Behavior

Frequency	Letter	Method
21	A	Parent or guardian of suspected truant contacted by phone
21	B	Parent conferences conducted
21	C	Truants receive in-school counseling
19	D	Parent or guardian of suspected truant notified by mail of student absence
6	E	Truant attendance officer visits home of suspected truant
10	F	Truant referred to community service organization other than law enforcement
21	G	Truants are suspended
11	H	Truants receive special education services
6	I	Truants receive special testing
2	J	Truants are placed in a work-study program
5	K	Truants are placed in a district alternative learning program
3	L	Truants are placed in vocational schools or vocational programs
12	M	Truants are expelled
4	N	Truants are given the option to attend other attendance centers in the same area
4	O	Truants are placed in residential schools
5	P	Any other practices you may be using in administrrating truancy related problems

Method P was an open-ended choice which asked for any other approach the respondents may have been using.

There were five responses to Method P and the following practices were indicated: (1) Corporal punishment with a witness, (2) In-school suspension, (3) Nurse sent to home to see if illness was a factor, (4) Take parents to court, and (5) Truancy policy sent to home by certified mail.

Table 7

A Comparison of the Percentage of Truants to the Methods Used in Administrating Truancy

Respondents	Numerical Conversion of % of Truants	Number of Approaches Used
1	1	7
2	6	6
3	1	6
4	1	7
5	2	10
6	3	12
7	3	8
8	1	6
9	1	6
10	3	8
11	1	6
12	7	9
13	1	11
14	1	7
15	4	6
16	2	10
17	1	7
18	3	12
19	1	5
20	1	11
21	1	8

For a clearer understanding of the method by which the percentage of truants was converted to a numerical value, Table 8 will exhibit the method of conversion.

Table 8  
Conversion of Percentage of Truants to  
a Numerical Value

Numerical Value	Percentage of Truants
1	= 0-5
2	= 5-10
3	= 10-15
4	= 15-20
5	= 20-25
6	= 25-30
7	= 30 or more

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the variables of the percentage of truants found in a school and the number of approaches being used in administrating truant behavior. The relationship computed to an  $r$  value of .087. The level of significance used in this comparison was the .05 level of significance. The  $r$  value that was required for this relationship to be significant was .3598 because it was a one-tailed test. The data obtained from determining the correlation of the two variables had an  $r$  value of .087 which is not significant at the .05 level

of significance. Therefore the relationship of .087 between these two variables could have been a chance happening. It appears from this test that the two variables are not relative to each other.

The final question on the questionnaire, Question Five, asked the respondents to review the sixteen methods for dealing with truancy that were previously listed. From this list, each administrator was asked to select the three methods which were considered most effective in administering truancy related problems. Table 9 exhibits the results of how many times each of the sixteen methods were chosen, listed by frequency of response.

The three preferred responses (letters B, A, and G) comprised 63 percent of the total responses to this question. The highest response (letter B, parent conferences conducted) was the most effective method used in administering truancy. This response received 28 percent of the total percentage of responses.

The administrators were consistent in their responses to the methods they considered most effective in administering truancy related problems.

Table 9

Effective Methods Used in  
Administering Truancy

Frequency	Letter	Method
18	B	Parent conferences conducted
12	A	Parent or guardian of suspected truant contacted by phone
10	G	Truants are suspended
7	C	Truants receive in-school counseling
4	E	Truant attendance officer visits home of suspected truant
3	F	Truant referred to community service agencies other than law enforcement
3	M	Truants are expelled
2	D	Parent or guardian of suspected truant notified by mail of student absence
2	K	Truants are placed in a district alternative learning program
1	L	Truants are placed in vocational schools or vocational programs
0	H	Truants receive special education services
0	I	Truants receive special testing
0	J	Truants are placed in a work-study program
0	N	Truants are given the option to attend other attendance centers in the same area
0	O	Truants are placed in residential schools
0	P	Other practices used in dealing with truancy related problems

## Chapter IV

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to arrive at a practical and workable definition for the term "truancy" which could be used in our public school systems. From a list of ten definitions of the term "truancy," one definition emerged as the preferred definition. Fourteen of the twenty-one administrators chose this definition as their first choice and five other administrators listed it as their second or third choice. A conclusion that can be drawn from this data is that the most practical and workable definition for the term "truancy" is, "Any absence that is without the consent of the parents or the school."

The relationship which was found to exist between the variables of the percentage of truants found in a school and the hours an administrator spent administering truancy-related matters was one of interest. This study revealed there was a significant relationship between the two variables. The relationship showed that as the percentage of students who were truant in the schools increased, so did the demands on the administrator's time. The correlation test used to analyze this data was not designed to study a causal or effectual comparison of the two variables. A possible point of departure from this research would be a

study of a cause and effect relationship between the two variables of the percentage of truants as related to the administrator's time.

In researching the relationship between the two variables of percentage of truants in a school and the variety of methods which were used in administering truancy problems, no significant correlation was found. The results of this data indicated that there was almost no relationship that existed between the two variables. The data did indicate however, that a wide variety of approaches were used to administer truancy problems by the sample group. The data received in the questionnaire indicates that the methods used in administering truant behavior were determined by the individual student's situation. The least number of methods used by an administrator in administering truancy was five; the greatest number was twelve. An averaging of the sample group exhibited eight different methods were used by administrators in administering truancy-related problems. A possible area for further research would be to study the various types of methods used in relationship to the effectiveness of each method as determined by actual attendance figures for the students involved.

The final objective of this study was to determine the methods that were most effective in administering truancy problems from the administrative point of view. This research showed that a variety of methods were used



but that four methods seemed to be the most effective. The methods which were selected are listed in order of popularity.

1. Parental conferences conducted
2. Parent or guardian of suspected truant contacted by phone
3. Truants are suspended
4. Truants receive in-school counseling

This data indicates that two preferred methods of solving truancy related problems involve communication between the school and the home. The response, "Parental conferences conducted," was ranked the highest and received 28 percent of the total responses. This indicated that confronting students with the problem of truancy in the presence of parents and an administrator is beneficial in defining and resolving attendance problems. A suggested area for further research would be the questioning of students and parents who have been involved in truancy related problems as to their opinions on the most effective methods to minimize truancy.

Of the remaining unanswered questions in the realm of public education, the problems of truancy and absenteeism are important questions to be considered. Some educational theorists are of the opinion that the 20th Century compulsory education system is outdated and in need of re-evaluation. With continued research into the cognitive

processes and advancements in computerization, it is hoped the problems of truancy and absenteeism will become moot points. Continued research is essential in the areas of human development, psychology and cognitive development. The purpose of this project has been to stimulate interest to move toward further investigation into truancy and absenteeism.

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## APPENDIX

Dear

My name is Doug Mason and I am in the process of completing my Educational Specialist Degree at Drake University. I am writing this letter to ask for your assistance in helping me collect data for a research paper which deals with the topics of truancy and absenteeism. This research will serve as the basis for my thesis project, "Defining Truancy and Dealing with it Effectively." The secondary school systems of the Central Iowa Conference have been selected as the sample group for this study. All of the secondary school administrators in the conference will be receiving this questionnaire.

The purpose behind this study is to collect data about the topics of truancy and absenteeism, and to arrive at a consistent and specific definition for the terms which will serve administrators in a practical and effective manner.

Your cooperation in filling out the enclosed questionnaire will be greatly appreciated. Upon completing the questionnaire, please enclose it in the self-addressed envelope and return it by May 28, 1982. If you would be interested in obtaining the results of this study please mark the appropriate blank on the questionnaire and it will be forwarded to you upon completion of this research study. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Doug Mason

Vocal Music Instructor

Urbandale High School

## TRUANCY

## DEFINITION AND CLARIFICATION

## QUESTIONNAIRE

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Please include the following information as a source of validation for this study.

Name-----

School District-----

What building level or levels do you currently administer?

\_\_\_\_ High School      \_\_\_\_ Junior High School      \_\_\_\_ Middle School

How many years have you been a practicing administrator? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like a copy of the final results of this study? \_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_no

The terms truant and absentee are being used synonomously throughout this study. In replying to the following questions please include all students who are either truant or who may be beyond the legal age limits of the compulsory education laws and are deemed to be absentees.

1. Rank the following definitions of the term truancy from 1 through 10. The number 1 ranking should describe the most practical and useful definition of the term truancy, and the 10th ranking should be the definition which you deem to be the least practical and useful definition of the term truancy.
  - A. \_\_\_\_ Absence without the knowledge or consent of the parent
  - B. \_\_\_\_ Three consecutive days of unexcused absence
  - C. \_\_\_\_ Repeated unexcused absence
  - D. \_\_\_\_ Any unexplained absence
  - E. \_\_\_\_ Absence without the consent of the parent or the school
  - F. \_\_\_\_ Five to ten days of unexcused absence in a 9 week period
  - G. \_\_\_\_ Absence with parental knowledge but without sufficient reason
  - H. \_\_\_\_ Twelve to fifteen days of unexcused absence
  - I. \_\_\_\_ Repeated unexcused absence after parental conference
  - J. \_\_\_\_ One or more days of absence per week with no acceptable reason;  
such as absences on certain days of the week like Mondays or  
Fridays
  
2. What percentage of your school building's population would you deem to be truant each year?
 

_____	0-5%
_____	5-10%
_____	10-15%
_____	15-20%
_____	20-25%
_____	25-30%
_____	more than 30%

3. How many hours per week would you estimate you spend working on matters which are directly related to truancy?

\_\_\_\_\_ 0-5 hrs.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 5-10 hrs.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 10-15 hrs.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 15-20 hrs.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 20-25 hrs.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 25-30 hrs.  
\_\_\_\_\_ more than 30 hrs.

4. Please place a check mark by each of the practices which, to your knowledge, have been utilized in your school building, this year, in response to truant behavior by students.

- A. \_\_\_\_\_ Parent or guardian of suspected truant contacted by telephone  
B. \_\_\_\_\_ Parent conferences conducted  
C. \_\_\_\_\_ Truants receive in-school counseling  
D. \_\_\_\_\_ Parent or guardian of suspected truant notified by mail of student absence  
E. \_\_\_\_\_ Truant attendance officer visits home of suspected truant  
F. \_\_\_\_\_ Truant referred to community service agencies other than law enforcement  
G. \_\_\_\_\_ Truants are suspended  
H. \_\_\_\_\_ Truants receive special education services  
I. \_\_\_\_\_ Truants receive special testing  
J. \_\_\_\_\_ Truants are placed in a work study program



## Question #4 continued

- K. \_\_\_\_ Truants are placed in district alternative learning program
- L. \_\_\_\_ Truants are placed in vocational schools or vocational programs
- M. \_\_\_\_ Truants are expelled
- N. \_\_\_\_ Truants are given the option to attend other attendance centers in the same area
- O. \_\_\_\_ Truants are placed in residential schools
- P. \_\_\_\_ Please indicate in the space provided below, any other practices which you may be using in dealing with truancy related problems

5. In reference to Question #4: please indicate the letter of three of the practices which are listed, that you feel are most effective in dealing with truancy related problems.

1. \_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_

Thank you for your cooperation in filling out  
and returning this questionnaire.